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# How To Make Sense Of Any Mess: Information Architecture For Everybody

## HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF ANY MESS

**Abby Covert**



## Synopsis

Everything is getting more complex. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the amount of information we encounter each day. Whether at work, at school, or in our personal endeavors, there's a deepening (and inescapable) need for people to work with and understand information. Information architecture is the way that we arrange the parts of something to make it understandable as a whole. When we make things for others to use, the architecture of information that we choose greatly affects our ability to deliver our intended message to our users. We all face messes made of information and people. I define the word "mess" the same way that most dictionaries do: a situation where the interactions between people and information are confusing or full of difficulties. "Who doesn't bump up against messes made of information and people every day? This book provides a seven step process for making sense of any mess. Each chapter contains a set of lessons as well as workbook exercises architected to help you to work through your own mess.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There is nothing wrong with Lou Rosenfeld's or Christina Wodtke's pre-eminent books on information architecture. But they are thick, dense reads you just can't hand to someone asking you, "So what IS information architecture anyway?" But now comes Abby Covert's short book that explains, plainly, why IA is important in unadorned text. I think we may look on this book in coming years the way we look on Don't Make Me Think: A book that can explain to the layperson why we in

the UX/IA world do what we do. It's short, plain, clear, and smart.

If I had to sum it up in one sentence, I'd say this book teaches "information architecture literacy". I'm not even sure the idea of such a thing existed before, but you only have to read this book to realize how it's critically needed... by everyone. The ALA defines information literacy as the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information". Obviously, these skills are still needed today, and not just by librarians and information professionals. But "use" in the old context seemed simpler: finding and applying the information directly. Now we're inhabiting places made of information, struggling with and trying to understand, create, and share complex messes of information. None of this is easy, it's disorienting and confusing, and many of us lack a good approach to figure this stuff out. That's where information architecture comes in. And Abby's book does an excellent job of explaining the core concepts in a way that is accessible and useful for anyone. This isn't a textbook, or some "thought leader's" magical process. You won't learn how to build a website or an app. It's a frank and interesting look at how to begin to figure stuff out. (Where "stuff" is the complex interaction of people, information, and technology.)

For people who have never heard about, or been taught techniques to help them organise information, this book is a fantastic introduction on how 'Information Architecture' as a practice is actually very relevant to all of us in our lives at home as well as at work. Less technical, more philosophical. Less theoretical, more practical this book is easy to consume and full of great gems of advice and practical help in the forms of workshops that can be applied simply with clients, stakeholders and colleagues.

If you are faced with a complex problem or challenge, you need to read this book. It is a very thoughtful, detailed and exhaustive collection of ways to deal with a mess. Checklists, questions, flowcharts | It is full of different tools that allow you to attack a mess from multiple angles. I have already recommended this book to several of my clients and will be using the ideas in it to help them attack nasty messes.

I loved that the chapters were so clear and concise with a different header on each page. I loved that the writing was funny ("used to be a Pizza Hut" and "hey nice ia said no one ever" :) I appreciate that she took the time to optimize the words here because I know that can take a ton of

time and thinking. ("I wanted to write you a shorter letter but I didn't have time" Mark Twain). I bet she chose to leave out the things that would have made things murkier. Well she nailed it because as it is this book is strong, tight, and sharp as a tack. No murk here. It is concise so it doesn't waste your time but it still has the best and most complete set of strategies for making sense of things, and I believe it could help anyone structure their presentations to make it understandable and to get their point across. Highly recommended.

This book has nothing but the facts, which is why I cannot give it 5 stars. The author does a fantastic job of breaking everything down to its key components. The weakness is that you do not really understand how you would use the information. You are left with facts, but not any understanding of how real world use would unfold. The topic is great, the outlined facts are well written and logical. It is that I need more to take benefit of the author's great work.

Terrific book. Smart enough to be a text book (used in the systems class at CCA) simple enough to read after a hard day's work, and fun enough you'll do so enjoyably. It's both a great resource to learn about the power of organization, and an easy reference for after and you need to go back and refer to this concept or that methodology. Buy two, one for you one for a friend. Because you're going to give this away, and then you'll miss your copy.

The title feels a bit ironic, as this book is a mess. Both when it comes to content and abstraction level, it is all over the place. Sometimes, the book feels like a philosophical book, discussing properties of empty space, and the subjectivity of information. At other times, it's concrete - like trying to explain what a Venn diagram is (and miraculously failing at that). Other times again, it feels like a short introduction to agile or HCI. The disconnected change of abstraction level makes it feel pretentious. Still giving it 3 stars, as it contains lots of useful information - at least for readers that are relatively new to the various topics covered.

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